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ABSTRACT

Kenya's dozen or more newspapers and 50 news sheets edited and published by Africans in the turbulent 1945-52 preindependence period were condemned as irresponsible, inflammatory, antiwhite, and seditious by the Kenya colonial government, and this characterization has been accepted by many scholars and journalists, including Africans. There is substantial evidence to show that the newspapers and even the mimeographed news sheets continued to argue for redress of specific African grievances as well as for changes in social, economic, and political policies with responsible arguments and in moderate language up until the Emergency Declaration proscribed the African publications in October of 1952. This reassessment of Kenya's African press is based in part on examination of government records and interviews with some African journalists of the period under study. The primary sources are clippings and tear sheets from the African press collected by Kenya's Criminal Investigation Division. The material, along with comments by colonial officials at the time, shows that the African press of Kenya was by any reasonable standard responsible and moderate much of the time. (Author/RB)

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Kenya's Maligned African Press: A Reassessment

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A quarter of a century after the United Nations called freedom of information "the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is dedicated,"[1] there are still many restrictions on the flow of information in Africa. There is, for example, little freedom for the press of Africa, especially if that freedom is defined as the right to report on and criticize government without fear of official reprisals.[2] Some have suggested that the mass media, the information source for an increasing number of people in an urbanizing continent, will be allowed more freedom in later stages of development at some unspecified date.[3] Freedom of expression in Africa, they say, will have to wait for political stability and economic opportunity plus some nongovernment resources adequate to support newspapers.[4]

One can argue that at the present stage of development the primary role of the African mass media is to act as an agent of government policy. However, some extend the argument to the point of suggesting that the Western concept of a free press is culture bound and not applicable to the African situation.[5] To reject "western" ideas favoring an unrestricted flow of information via the spoken and written word leads to some serious problems for those supporting a substantial role for the mass media in the developing areas. It makes it difficult to defend such widely held assumptions

CS 201 571

that knowledge is better than ignorance and that to participate actively in one's nation is better than to be isolated from it.[6]

However, putting aside such philosophical disputes as beyond the scope of this paper, we still would point out that the Western notion of a press free to report on and criticize the government has existed in some parts of Africa for a century. In the former British colonies of both East and West Africa decades before independence African editors considered it proper and indeed patriotic to state their views on public issues even if those views were opposed by the government.[7]

Several studies of the African press of British West Africa have been published and it is prominently mentioned in some of the histories of the area. The African newspapers of British West Africa have also become an important source for researchers.[8] For East Africa, however, there have been no important published studies of the pre-independence African press of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda, and standard books on the history and politics of the area barely mention it.[9] The African newspapers of East Africa have not been an important source for researchers and even those writing about them have had to depend almost entirely on secondary sources.

There are two apparent reasons why the African press of East Africa has been neglected. First, unlike the African press of British West Africa, which was in English,[10] the African press of East Africa was almost entirely in vernacular languages, mainly Swahili, Kikuyu and Luganda. Those writing about East Africa were

Europeans and Americans and few of them could read those African languages very well. The second reason for the neglect of the pre-independence African newspapers has been their unavailability. For varying reasons, no one kept copies of them for very long. African editors had neither the time nor the inclination to think about history as they struggled to publish newspapers without capital, equipment or training.[11] Libraries, run by Europeans, did not collect the African newspapers or news sheets.[12] Also, for Africans it was dangerous to be caught with a copy of many of these papers since they were frequently proscribed. When the 1952 Emergency was declared in Kenya, persons possessing copies of proscribed African newspapers and news sheets were subject to jail penalties even if the publications were dated before the Emergency.[13]

Despite this lack of original sources or perhaps because of it the view that the African press of pre-Independence Kenya was almost totally irresponsible and subversive has been gradually accepted. Hachten, who has written extensively on the African press, quotes a 1954 article in a British magazine in stating:

> In 1945 Henry Mworia started Mumenyereri, the first of a number of African papers that developed in the post war years largely as outlets for the political and economic grievances of the energetic Kikuyus. By the time of the Mau Mau Emergency there were about forty of these "violently written papers, mainly in Kikuyu, mainly mineographed, mostly highly seditious and taking a bitterly anti-White, 'Quit Kenya' line."[14]

A 1956 study by Kitchen stated that Kenya'a African press "has consisted almost exclusively of, on the one hand, extremist news sheets and, on the other, of government and missionary sponsored papers..."[15]

Lord Hailey in his African survey said without qualification that the Kikuyu news sheets "were bitterly racial,[16] failing to distinguish them from the more moderate Kikuyu newspapers.

An exception was Rosberg and Nottingham's study of the Mau Mau, a sympathetic account of the Kenya nationalist movement which called the African newspapers "nationalist and militant in outlook."[17] Like the other studies and surveys, theirs did not cite any African newspapers as original sources in their brief two-page report on this African press.

Almost all of the studies agree that Kenya's African press had a role, perhaps a decisive one, in the nationalist movement.[18] But almost all are also willing to accept the view that this press was usually irresponsible, sometimes violent, and frequently seditious. The only published study of this African press which did examine material from the newspapers themselves supported this view. This was Corfield's study of the Mau Mau, which was sponsored by the British Colonial Office. Corfield said the African press of Kenya between the end of World War II and the 1952 Emergency Declaration published a "torrent of subversion" and was constantly attacking the government and Europeans.[19] Not surprisingly, he was able to quote numerous colonial officials who agreed with him. While those writing about the Kenya African press of this period may suspect Corfield's views to be biased, they have presented little or no evidence to suggest they should be reconsidered.

This paper will attempt to show that there should be a re-evaluation of the African press of pre-Independence Kenya. It

will not argue that this press did not present anti-government and anti-European material, including some clearly subversive articles, since even Kenya's African leaders of the period have admitted that it did.[20] However, there is a substantial amount of evidence to show that some of the African press was, even at its worst in the eyes of colonial officials, asking for reasonable reforms and supporting gradual rather than violent change much of the time. Some of this evidence can be found in Corfield's report itself when he complains that Kenya's Attorney General frequently refused requests to prosecute African publishers and editors.[21] Official records also show that some colonial officials thought most African editors held cooperative attitudes toward the government and were doing a reasonable job considering their lack of training and other problems.[22] A former Kenya Supreme Court Justice has also suggested that in many instances the African newspapers were no more seditious than the European newspapers of the time in Kenya, but colonial officials ignored transgressions by the latter.[23]

All this, however, is secondary evidence. The primary evidence to support the argument that a responsible African press existed in Kenya in the pre-independence period will be material published in the African newspapers themselves. As we have said, almost all copies of these newspapers have disappeared. However, the Kenya National Archives do contain a collection of what we can assume Kenya colonial officials considered examples of irresponsible, violent and seditious material in these newspapers between 1945 and 1952, when almost all of them were banned. The Archives have

files of clippings from these newspapers forwarded by the Criminal Investigation Division to the Chief Native Commissioner.[24] The clippings were usually accompanied by a translation and comments by various officials were frequently added. The clippings and comments show clearly what material in the African press most disturbed colonial authorities. However, the material also suggests that by any reasonable standard the African press of Kenya was not totally irresponsible and seditious.[25] Kenya's African newspapers did frequently criticize the colonial government and the colony's European minority, but the critical articles, letters and editorials which the CID collected were often based on facts and presented in moderate language.[26]

Before the sudden appearance after World War II of a dozen or more newspapers in Kenya, there had hardly been any independent African press at all in the colony. The dominant newspaper since the early years of the century had been the English-language East African Standard, a strong supporter of settler rule. In 1940 the Standard took over from the government publication of a popular Swahili weekly, Baraza (Council). Needless to say, Baraza was a consistent supporter of the colonial government. There were a few small Asian newspapers, the most important being the Kenya Daily Mail at Mombasa. The missions published some African-language monthlies, but there had been few attempts before 1945 by Africans to start their own publications. In 1921 Harry Thuku published a few issues of a Swahili news sheet called Tangazo (News) with the help of an Asian printer in Nairobi, but the effort ended

when Thuku wound up in jail and the printer was forced into bankruptcy.[27] The Kikuyu Central Association published the monthly Mwigwithania (The Reconciler) sporadically in the 1920s and 1930s and at one time its editor was Jomo Kenyatta.[28] The paper was banned by colonial authorities at the beginning of World War II. A Luo Magazine appeared for a time in Nairobi and there were some other Luo and English publications appearing in the late 1930s around Kisumu in Western Kenya but no independent African publication of wide circulation and political or social importance appeared in Kenya until near the end of World War II.

The first of these post-war African newspapers was probably Mumenyereri (He Who Looks After), started as a monthly Kikuyu pamphlet in May, 1945.[29] Editor and publisher was Henry Muoria, a former locomotive driver, who had the help of his wife and used the press of Asian publisher G. L. Vidyarthi. Over the next seven years Mumenyereri grew to become the best known African weekly in Kenya with a circulation of 10,000 and sometimes higher. At one time Muoria had four employees and his own press to publish Mumenyereri, called by many "the paper of Kikuyu patriotism."[30]

Other African newspapers appearing about the same time in Kenya were Sauti ya Mwafrika (Voice of the African), the official paper of the Kenya African Union, which supported Jomo Kenyatta; Ramogi (News), a Luo weekly based in Nairobi but circulating widely in Western Kenya; The Nyanza Times, a Luo periodical published sporadically at Kisumu; Mwalimu (Teacher), a Swahili newspaper edited

by Francis Khamisi, probably the most experienced of the African journalists; Radio Posta (Radio Post), an anti-Kenyatta paper produced by W. W. Awori, and Uhuru Wa Afrika (Freedom for Africa), a Swahili paper published by Kamba leader Paul Ngei and considered by some to be the most radical of the independent African publications.[31]

The African newspapers had constant financial problems and difficulty finding responsible distribution agents and printers they could afford. At one time almost all of them were printed on an old Nairobi hand press bought by Oginga Odinga from the Asian Daily Chronicle. However, many of these newspapers had circulations in the thousands and the news and ideas they presented circulated widely and rapidly throughout Kenya's African society. One former assistant editor of Mumenyereri, now doing church work in Kenya, said a single issue of one of these African papers was often read by one African to dozens of illiterate villagers.[32]

What was in these African newspapers which caused such concern to colonial authorities in Kenya? The Criminal Investigation Division files showed there was considerable attention given to specific African grievances in the lengthy letter columns. Writers complained about such general problems in African society as loafing on the job, gambling, prostitution, liquor selling and criminal activity. But there were also complaints about what was seen as government mistreatment. In April, 1948, Mumenyereri published a letter from a woman who said she had waited many hours before

being treated at a public clinic. Along with the clipping was a memorandum from an official stating that the complaint was "in the main justified."[33] Another Mumenyereri letter was from an African woman who complained that she had received only $200 from the government after her husband, a civil servant, was killed in a road accident. Replying to an inquiry from Nairobi, the Provincial Commissioner wrote that the man had no insurance, was killed off duty, and the payment was made "ex gratia."[34] Even some African complaints against individual Europeans could find official support if an African newspaper brought it to the attention of the government. In July, 1948, Mumenyereri reported that an African girl had been severely injured by a European's dog. A police investigation confirmed the report and the government was preparing to prosecute.[35]

Mumenyereri, then, was playing the traditional newspaper role of bringing its readers' grievances to the attention of government. Baraza, the Swahili weekly published by the Standard, believed it had a different role. Letters of complaint written by Africans to Baraza were forwarded to the Chief Native Commissioner, although the writer's name was deleted. When the government's reply to the letter was in hand, Baraza's editor then considered publishing "a watered down" version along with "the facts" provided by the government.[36] Baraza published only a few such letters. George Kinnear, an executive of the Standard Company, wrote to Chief Native Commissioner Eric St. A. Davies: "I hesitate to publish letters of complaint from Africans if they seem intended to keep

the pot boiling or stir up fresh trouble."[37]

Just how closely the Baraza editors and Kenya government officials worked together is suggested by one incident. In 1947 the East African Standard reported that the Kenya High Court had ruled that Africans could hold peaceful meetings without the permission of their chiefs, usually conservative Africans who owed their positions to Colonial authorities. A week later Baraza editor J. MacDowall Wilson wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner asking if his paper should publish a similar report. Wilson noted that an unidentified government official had asked him "to suppress the report" and that he was seeking clarification. There is no record of a reply to Wilson.[38]

Articles which rarely if ever appeared in the European-controlled press of Kenya and which greatly disturbed government authorities when they were published in the African newspapers were those touching on racial discrimination. African editors soon learned, however, that they could safely write about it if they did not relate it to the situation in Kenya. Sauti ya Mwafrika published numerous accounts of racial discrimination in the United States and commented that European discrimination against the African was a major cause of racial hatred.[39] An African girl who visited South Africa wrote that all jobs were reserved for Europeans.[40] In September, 1948, Radio Posta reported the shooting of a Negro boy in the United States and commented that the policeman involved would probably go unpunished because white juries allowed such

shootings. Kenya's Director of Security and Intelligence asked the Attorney General if the paper could be prosecuted, but there is no record of any prosecution or even a reply.[41]

Nationalist movements in other parts of Africa were reported on in Kenya's African press and many of these stories were collected by the CID. Mumenyereri, Sauti ya Mwafrika and other papers began making comparisons with Kenya, prompting the Director of Security to ask again about the possibility of prosecution but no action was taken by the Attorney General.

One reason Kenya officials were particularly alert for references to individuals and groups overseas is that many of them were convinced that "agitators," particularly Communists, were causing most of the trouble between Africans and Furopeans in the colony. The Daily Chronicle, a Nairobi paper edited by a young Asian named Pio Pinto, cause a flurry among colonial officials when it suggested that communism might offer an alternative to Africans burdened by colonial rule.[43] Another Chronicle article disturbing to the British reported the failure of the huge peanut growing scheme in neighboring Tanganyika. Kenya's Director of Security reported that it had been written by the propaganda department of the Communist Party in London.[44] The British suspected that radical young Asians in Kenya were links between Moscow and African nationalists.

African newspapers, according to the CID evidence, showed little interest in communism. Stated a Mumenyereri editorial in May, 1948: "There are very few Africans in the country who know anything about Russian rule; therefore, it is not fair that Africans should be alleged to have an idea of a people from another country about which

very little is known by them...Poverty is the cause of agitation... When people ask for better housing, it is because they need it. Is that communism?"[45] In another editorial a few months later Mumenyereri warned its readers to avoid communism since it would only lead them to greater troubles.[46]

Kenya's African newspapers were, of course, directly linked with the nationalist movement. Sauti ya Mwafrika was the spokesman for Kenyatta's Kenya African Nationalist Union, Ramogi was Luo leader Odinga's newspaper, Uhuru Wa Afrika was controlled by Kamba leader Ngei and Radio Posta was at one time the paper of those opposing Kenyatta's leadership. The British also suspected that Mumenyereri was the headquarters of those trying to revive the banned Kikuyu Central Association to counter Kenyatta's growing influence.[47] However, despite these ties with Kenya's nationalist movement, the African press remained essentially a press of protest rather than nationalism. One reason may be that Kenya's nationalist movements were not well enough organized or financed to make serious use of the African press and didn't think it was very important since most of their followers were illiterate.[48] In any case, most of the material which the CID considered subversive enough to clip and forward involved attempts by Africans to obtain redress of economic, social and political grievances.

One of the major grievances was the rigid control of the African chiefs, particularly in the large Kikuyu tribe which dominated the Nairobi area. Kenya's African press frequently complained that the

chiefs were arbitrary and deaf to advice or complaints. The African press campaigned vigorously for repeal of the ordinance which prohibited public meetings without the chief's permission and favored more popular control of the chiefs. "We the public demand the power to remove any chief who becomes unpopular," wrote an African in a letter to Mumenyereri.[49] A frequent target was Senior Kikuyu Chief Kungu Waruhiu, a loyal supporter of British policies from the time he assumed office in 1929. After one Mumenyereri attack on Waruhiu the European District Officer at Kiambu urged the "strongest possible action" against anyone who could be charged with libeling the Chief. The District Officer wrote that Waruhiu's "outspoken advocation of co-operation between Europeans and Africans is being used as a source of agitation against him."[50] The Chief Native Commissioner saw no grounds for action, but a sedition charge was brought when Mumenyereri claimed that Africans had to bribe chiefs in order to get their cases reported favorably to the District Officer. After the paper printed an apology, the action was dropped.[51]

Some of the African grievances published in the African press went to the basic issue of the European position in Kenya, of course. And the most important grievance in the eyes of the Africans was European occupation of their land, land needed for an expanding African population. Radio Posta charged that the Europeans had tricked the Africans and stolen their land. "For how many cents did Lord Delamere buy one acre?" the newspaper asked in an editorial. "And how much money did he get from it ...?"[52] Mumenyereri attacked an East African Standard report that everywhere the Chief Native

Commissioner went on a tour the Africans asked for more European settlers. "This is untrue," said Mumenyereri, "our land here is too small and we would not like more Europeans to come here."[53] Even Wathiomo Mukinyu, a Catholic mission paper, agreed that the Africans needed more land.[54] Hindi ya Gikuyu (People of Kikuyu) said, "The British took our land by force and we shall never recognize their ownership of a single piece of land in Kikuyu country."[55]

"I dislike this article intensely," Chief Native Commissioner P. Wyn Harris wrote to the Attorney General. But Harris said the land issue was so inflammatory among all the Kikuyu that he did not recommend that any action be taken against the paper.[56] During the entire 1945-1952 period no legal action was taken against any African publication for comments on the land issue despite numerous bitter articles clipped by the CID. After one article on the Olengurone land dispute, in which 12,000 Kikuyu were forced to move, Mumenyereri editor Henry Muoria was called to the Attorney General's office and told, "I am not threatening you or stopping you from following your creeds or opinions concerning the Africans, but if you write such news again you will go to prison or be deported."[57]

In their dealings with the African newspapers, British officials were usually careful to observe the legal technicalities. Several African editors who escaped prosecution for sedition were fined for not registering their papers properly, for example. When Mumenyereri published a letter calling on Africans to refuse to do the required annual road work for their chiefs, the paper escaped with a warning but the letter writer was prosecuted because it was discovered he

belonged to the banned Kikuyu Central Association.[58] The one time Mumenyereri's editor was prosecuted for seditious publication came when Muoria reported that four striking Africans had been shot by European police at a factory at Lari. In fact, only three Africans had been killed and by African police, not Europeans. Muoria was fined $70 and sentenced to six months in prison but the term was considerably reduced and it is not clear if he ever served it.[59]

Muoria's account of how he got the story about the Lari shootings shows just how irresponsible African editors sometimes were. Muoria said he got the information from his "correspondent," but admitted he had never met the correspondent until he showed up at the paper with the account of the shooting. "I simply thought that it was big news fit to be published and did not enquire whether it was seditious or not," said Muoria.[60] Such attitudes were frequently found in African editors and suggested how desperate they were for news and how ill-equipped they were to get it. Even though they were critical of the Kenya government in almost every issue, one report found that most of the African editors published about 80 per cent of the government's press releases.[61]

Kenya's African press has been accused of preaching violence and hatred of Europeans.[62] This is not supported by the CID material from the African newspapers although some of the mimeographed Kikuyu news sheets which appeared later were more extreme. Kenya officials also believe that many articles and editorials tended to incite anti-European violence. For example, in 1948 Mumenyereri published a letter which charged that Kikuyu women forced to work on land conservation projects were having miscarriages and fleeing to Nairobi to become prostitutes. Kenya's Director of Security asked that the newspaper

be prosecuted on the grounds that it was inciting violence, but no action was taken.[63] Another Mumenyereri article which the CID objected to on the same grounds was a parable, written by Muoria's wife, which told of God rescuing an African being mistreated by a European.[64] However, Mumenyereri frequently warned against violence and said the government would treat the Africans fairly in the end. The paper told African squatters occupying a European farm in 1948 to "take these matters before the government."[65] "The duty of the African Association is to seek justice without disturbance," an editorial said.[66] As late as 1950 Mumenyereri warned its readers not to be misled into rash action by false rumors that Nairobi's expansion would require more Kikuyu land.[67]

As early as 1947 colonial officials in Kenya, including the Chief Native Commissioner, were warning that the African press was promoting agitation and it could lead to bloodshed.[68] Yet, the African newspapers most widely read continued to preach moderation, calling for gradual and non-violent change. An illustration of this is the reaction of Mumenyereri, Ramogi and Radio Posta to a speech by Governor Sir Philip Mitchel in October, 1947. Addressing a meeting of Kikuyu chiefs, Mitchell said bluntly that the Europeans were in Kenya to stay and the Kikuyu must make do with the land they had. Mitchell said it was Kikuyu population growth and not the Europeans that had led to the land shortage. The Kikuyu were badly shaken by Mitchell's speech, but the reaction of all three African newspapers was in moderate language.

Mumenyereri said the Governor's speech was "heartbreaking to all Africans," but reiterated that the African was willing to work hard and cooperate if only the European would allow him a fair chance. Addressing Kenya's European settlers, a Mumenyereri editorial said:

> You will be surprised to see what we shall be in 50 years to come, if you do not oppress Agikuyu by hindering them in education, stopping their trade and by depriving them of their pieces of land. The Agikuyu...do not want to feel they are below the white man or Indians, we want to be like them and we know that the only way to get to this stage is to have wisdom and money and to work hard with our hands. Give us the chance to make an effort because most of the Africans we see with motor cars and store buildings have not achieved their gains by the money earned from Europeans but from their trading business and from their shambas. 69

Ramogi, the most important of the non-Kikuyu vernacular newspapers, disputed the claims of Mitchell and other Europeans that they had brought only benefits to the African. Said Ramogi:

> When he compares those good old days with the present unsettled conditions no doubt Governor Mitchell and all those old bwanas who are still alive must feel uneasy. But whatever feelings the white master may have toward the black underdog, he must understand that it was these very same people who disrupted our discipline and morals and failed to substitute a better code of behavior. They no doubt brought us education and taught us to live in clean and hygenic conditions. Yet they refused to pay us wages which would enable us to live up to the standards they taught us. They brought us a religion which teaches equality in the eyes of God, yet in practice they treat us as inferiors. 70

Radio Posta, the Swahili weekly, attacked Mitchell's contention that unrest among Kikuyus was the work of agitators. Following the Mitchell speech an editorial asked:

> Who are more anxious that the African gets a fair deal from the Government and enjoys the same rights like other citizens in this country than the so-called agitators? Why is all that they say in public meetings called Utopia? And what is this Utopia? What our politicians are struggling for are some of these: a common law for all citizens, equal opportunities in education, social and economic services for their people, equal representation of the African in public bodies, medical services, etc., etc. Now is all this Utopia?[71]

Despite African disappointment over the attitude of Kenya officials, the CID files indicate the vernacular press remained remarkably free of any calls for drastic action before 1950. There was instead great stress on education as the answer. One letter in Mumenyereri said education must "enable us to get back our land of which we were robbed by the white community, the land given to us by Mr. Gikuyu. Education is the spear and the shield of the country."[72] In Kikuyu country an extensive system of independent schools was started, funds were collected to send young Africans overseas to study, and plans were made for a Kikuyu college at Fort Hall. Learning of the Court of International Justice, Mumenyereri urged the Kikuyu on to greater educational efforts. Said an editorial, "When we black people become well-educated, and have our lawyers and magistrates, we shall forward the case of our lands, which were robbed from us by the British."[73]

By late 1947 Kenya's Chief Native Commissioner decided that some action had to be taken to counter the growing influence of the African press. "If we are to avoid trouble, we have got to fight this deliberate attempt to drive a wedge between the African peoples and the Europeans in this country,"[74] he wrote. With the Attorney General

continuing to show reluctance to prosecute the African press, the Kenya government decided to publish its own vernacular newspapers to compete with it. Four government vernacular newspapers were planned and the first, the Kikuyu-language Mucemanio (News), finally appeared in June, 1948. The District Welfare Officer at Fort Hall, in the heart of Kikuyu country, reported African reaction to be "100 per cent NIL because the paper is dead, completely dead."[75] Numerous suggestions to improve Mucemanio were made, including one that it print some "responsible criticism" of the government, but by the end of the year it ceased publication and the other proposed government papers never were started.

With the failure of its vernacular press scheme the Kenya government sought new ways to control the African press. In June, 1950, the Kenya Legislature amended the Penal Code to give the government power to seize presses used to print seditious literature. Attorney General K.K. O'Connor said the law was needed "for in this country certain not very well educated persons and Africans are being seduced from their own way of life by an Asian brand of communism."[76] At this time almost all the African newspapers were being printed on Asian-owned presses. When the new law went into effect, the Asian printers either refused to publish the African newspapers or demanded prices which the papers could not afford.

"No law could have more effectively gagged the vernacular press," wrote the Daily Chronicle, "even though the law in question may have been made with entirely different motives. To allow this state of affairs to continue would be to defeat the end of democracy."[77] Mumenyereri, Ramogi, Radio Posta and even the Kenya African Nationalist Union's Sauti ya Mwafrika began to miss more publication dates and produce smaller issues. Asian printers who would risk publishing the African newspapers insisted that all questionable material be left out. By January, 1951, Mumenyereri, Ramogi and several smaller vernacular newspapers were all being produced on an African-owned single sheet, hand press described by one Kenya official as "practically worthless."[78] The African editors had to spend much of their time printing the papers at the rate of 600 sheets per hour, many pages turning out "practically illegible."[79] Total circulation of of these newspapers, practically all that remained of the non-mimeographed independent African press, was down to 10,000 weekly.

One of the results of the new restrictions on the printed African newspapers was the appearance of what Corfield described as a "rash of small but intensely subversive news sheets,"[80] most of them mimeographed and in Kikuyu. Among the most notorious, according to Corfield, were Inoro ria Gikuyu, Wiyathi, Mugambo, Muramati, Wiyathi, Afrika Mpya, Wihuge, Wasya wa Mukamba (a Kenya African Nationalist Union publication), and Uhuru wa Mwafrika, one of several Swahili publications in Kenya to carry this name. A review of the CID translations from these news sheets shows how broad was the official definition of subversion.

21-Scotton-Kenya press

In October, 1952, just before the Emergency Declaration, the Chief Native Commissioner sent to the Colonial Office in London "a selection of the many near-seditious articles which have appeared recently in the various African newspapers."[81] The news sheet from which the most articles were forwarded was Inoro ria Gikuyu (The Sharpening Stone of the Kikuyu). A summary of the material is as follows:

1. Editorial on "The Benefits of Self Government," which states, "The Ghana experience proves that Africans can govern themselves. Europeans are actually retarding progress by the African." (From the issue of June 2, 1952)

2. Cartoon: European sitting at a table with a full plate telling African with empty plate, "Your affairs have been under consideration since 1920. You will be granted all your needs." (June 2, 1952)

3. Editorial which points out that in the proposed Central African Federation Legislature Africans would have only six of 35 seats. In the light of such facts, "Africans should doubt the possibility of cooperation with Europeans." (June 23, 1952)

4. Editorial under the heading "Why Are People Deported?" It protests the deportation of labor leaders Makhan Singh and Chege Kibachia. "The system of deporting indigenous peoples by the ruling race, due to the fact they are politically dangerous, is unjust. We have learnt in history that is only those people who have the welfare of their race at heart who are deported." (June 30, 1952)

5. Editorial on the arrival of Europeans in East Africa: "In one hand they carried a Bible and in the other hand a gun with which they

robbed the native of his land and cowed him...Let us be proud that we are Africans and repay bad treatment with bad treatment and good with good. They are few, we are many. They cannot continually enslave us. Let us unite, fight for justice and against slavery. We are Africans and Africa is ours." (July 14, 1952)

6. Editorial in response to an East African Standard article on the benefits of European leadership to Kenya: "It is useless to discuss cooperation with the European. Let us first attain self-government, and when the European begs for cooperation, it will be considered." (July 14, 1952)

Under the Kenya Penal Code all of the above material from Inoro ria Gikuyu could be held not only subversive but legally seditious. For the Kenya Code defined sedition in terms of seditious intention, which includes any attempt to "excite disaffection" against the government or "promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different classes of the population of the Colony."[82] Under the Kenya law mere publication of the offending matter was proof that the publisher intended to incite violence. However, the Kenya Attorney General, under pressure from the Colonial Office in London, only used the sedition law nine times between 1945 and 1952, five times against Asian newspapers and four times against African publications. Some of the African cases did involve material which was clearly preaching violence against the government and the European minority.

In 1950 J.C.K. Kamau, an editor of Hindi ya Gikuyu, was sentenced to six months in prison after he published an editorial which stated, "If we should want freedom, we must prepare ourselves

to buy it with blood and monies."[83] In another prosecution, the editor of the mimeographed news sheet Muramati was fined $60 after reporting the words of a Kikuyu elder at a political meeting. The words, which the editor put in large type over the story about the meeting, were, "The Europeans are the knives and the black people are the meat; but the time will come when they become the meat and the black people will become the knives."[84] The defense argued that the words were simply a metaphor of the kind often used by uneducated people and the Magistrate did agree that publishing them was "more irresponsible than criminal." Corfield, and no doubt many other Europeans, saw the words as "a direct incitement to murder."[85]

There was one prosecution of a European publication during this period in Kenya, involving the Kenya Weekly News. Known as "The Settlers' Paper," it became a forum for extreme settler views. One letter it published stated that government programs to improve the African were a waste since he was inherently primitive and basically savage. There was strong protest from the African community and the Kenya government prosecuted both the writer, Dr. Geoffrey Dunderdale, and the magazine for sedition. Unlike Africans, however, Europeans in Kenya were entitled to trial by a jury, which acquitted Dunderdale, forcing the government to abandon its prosecution against the Kenya Weekly News.[86]

It is clear then that there were irresponsible publications in Kenya in the pre-independence years of 1945-1952. Most of these may well have been African publications. But there were African newspapers and even African news sheets which argued the African case in moderate

if sometimes forceful language and preached not violence but education, work and gradual improvement. Some Kenya officials believed that some of the problems with the African press were the fault of the government. H.C.E. Downes, Kenya's Press Office in 1950 and 1951, found many African editors responsive to suggestions that they check material with appropriate government officials for accuracy. He persuaded government officials to stop ignoring requests from African editors and tried to establish training programs and technical assistance. By April, 1951, Downes reported, "As a result of supplying these editors with a simple weekly world and local news letter they are filling the space previously occupied with seditious and libelous articles and to their astonishment the sales of their newspapers have increased considerably.[87]

Unfortunately, many of Downes' plans to assist and improve the African press were delayed by questions and doubts among government officials and hostility from those who saw successful African newspapers an even greater threat to Kenya's Europeans. The scheme collapsed on October 20, 1952, when they Kenya Government declared a State of Emergency and banned almost every African newspaper and all the mimeographed news sheets. Most of the African editors were among the thousands arrested and sent to detention camps.

This paper has tried to present some evidence to counter the generally accepted view that the African press of Kenya from 1945 to 1952 was a violent, seditious and irresponsible press. The files of Kenya's Criminal Investigation, which we would assume to contain some of the worst examples of irresponsible journalism from this press, show there was much in these African papers which was moderate

and responsible and in favor of gradual and peaceful change. Because of language barriers and the unavailability of the Kenya newspapers, this has not been widely recognized. Even African journalists in Kenya accept the general view that Kenya's pre-independence press was made up of irresponsible and often violent news sheets that contributed little or nothing to the independent struggle.[88]

As Herbert Muller points out, man's history has a meaning to him because it is given meaning by man.[89] Freedom of the press in the United States and Great Britain is normally buttressed with precedent and historical argument[90] and even some who suggest much of the argument is erroneous cite the importance of "experience."[91] The problem in Africa and other former colonial areas is that much of the history or experience has been interpreted by those who were politically sympathetic or intellectually attuned to the colonial era. Many African leaders have said that Africans will never be able to live self-confidently in the world until they rescue their past from colonial or at least non-African interpretations.[92]

For this to happen all the possible "facts" of the past have to be unearthed. This will at least allow the African to make up his own mind about what the facts of history are, and what hints for the present and future about such ideas as freedom of expression are found in those facts.[93] Some facts of the African press of pre-independence Kenya have been hidden or at least neglected for too long.

Notes

[1]Quoted in Wilbur Schramm, Mass Media and National Development (Stanford University Press, 1964), p. ix.

[2]William A. Hachten, Muffled Drums (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 47.

[3]Schramm, op. cit., p. 268. This is a summary of the views of Fernand Terrou, Director of the French Institute of the Press, which are expanded in pp. 234-245.

[4]Hachten, op. cit., p. 50.

[5]Ibid., pp. 49-50. To be fair, Hachten thinks the concept might do better in Africa in the future. African political leaders have often suggested that their countries were not ready for a free press. For example, see Tom Mboya, Freedom and After (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1963), pp. 93-98. Few have been so blunt in public as former Communications Minister Felix Onama of Uganda who told Parliament, "I am one of those people who do not believe in freedom of the press." International Press Institute Report, January, 1963, p. 23.

[6]These assumptions and others are stated by Schramm, op. cit., p. 35.

[7]For evidence on this from West Africa, see Robert W. July, The Origins of Modern African Thought (London: Faber and Faber, 1968). For East Africa, see James F. Scotton, "The First African Press in East Africa: Protest and Nationalism in Uganda," International Journal of African Historical

Studies, VI (Spring, 1973), pp. 211-228.

[8]See for example, Fred Omu, "The Dilemma of Press Freedom in Colonial Africa: The West African Example," Journal of African History, IX:2 (1968), pp. 279-298, and Stanley Shaloff, "Press Controls and Sedition Proceedings in the Gold Coast, 1933-39, "African Affairs, 70:2 (1971), pp. 241-263. One historical study which pays considerable attention to the African press of the Gold Coast is David Kimble, A Political History of Ghana (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 506-553. A study which has made extensive use of the Nigerian press as sources is G. O. Olusanya, The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953 (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1973).

[9]For example, two standard histories of East Africa barely mention the half dozen or more African newspapers in Uganda in the 1920s. These are Vincent Harlow and E. M. Chilver, History of East Africa, Vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), and Kenneth Ingham, A History of East Africa (New York: Praeger, 1965). Ingham's one reference to one of these newspapers is based on a report in an English-language newspaper. Studies of the history or politics of the individual East African territories dismiss the African press in a page or two with the exception of Lofchie's study of Zanzibar, which gives extensive coverage to the newspapers on that island. See Michael J. Lofchie,

Zanzibar: Background to Revolution (Princeton University Press, 1965).

[10]One study states that of more than 50 newspapers in British West Africa, not more than six had been published in the vernacular, the majority being in English. George H. T. Kimble, Tropical Africa, Vol. 2 (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1960), p. 143.

[11]E. M. K. Mulira, an editor and publisher in Uganda in the 1950s and 1960s and also a member of Uganda's Parliament, told the author that he could not find a single copy of his newspapers. Interview with Mulira, Kampala, June 12, 1970.

[12]For example, the MacMillan Library in Nairobi has extensive collections of the English-language newspapers of Kenya but no copies of the African-language newspapers published before independence.

[13] Government Notice 304 (February 25, 1953), Kenya Gazette of 1953, p. 174.

[14] Hachten, op. cit., p. 202. The quotation is from an unsigned article, "An African Press Survey: East and Central Africa," New Commonwealth, Aug. 19, 1954. p. 171.

[15] Helen Kitchen, ed., The Press in Africa (Washington, D.C.: Ruth Sloan Associates, Inc., 1956), p. 27.

[16] Lord Hailey, An African Survey Revised 1956 (Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 1238. The author was a bit less

sweeping in describing the large number of West African news sheets, "some of them irresponsibly edited." (p. 1239).

[17] Carl G. Rosberg Jnr. and John Nottingham, The Myth of "Mau Mau" (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966), pp. 211-212.

[18] For example, Kitchen, op. cit., p. 27, and Hachten, op. cit., p. 202.

[19] F. D. Corfield, Historical Survey of the Origin and Growth of Mau Mau (London: H. Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), p. 198.

[20] Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 82.

[21] Corfield, op. cit., pp. 192, 195-196.

[22] "Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Information Services" (Nairobi: Native Affairs Department, 1950), p. 11 (typescript). This report is part of the 1950 Kenya Annual Native Affairs Report.

[23] Interview with Justice Chanan Singh, Nairobi, September 25, 1969.

[24] The files begin at 8/102 CNC and run through 8/111.

[25]After a 1940 Privy Council ruling, seditious publication in the British colonies became anything the colonial legislature said it was. These legislatures were, of course, controlled by Europeans who saw almost any African complaint as subversive if not seditious. Thus, even moderate criticism of government could be seditious under Keyna colonial law. Even the Kenya Attorney General thought the Kenya law could lead to unacceptable limits on the African press. KNA 8/132 CNC L/3/84/1, letter dated October 31, 1951, from Kenya Attorney General to Provincial Commissioners.

[26]Of course, there is always the possibility that the most irresponsible material was removed from the files for some political reason. The sequential numbering of the documents makes this very unlikely.

[27]For Thuku's own account see, Harry Thuku: An Autobiography (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1971). The account was written with the assistance of Kenneth King.

[28]"Muigwithania," Africa, VI:2 (April, 1933), p. 225.

[29]Corfield, op. cit., p. 195.

[30]Interview with Henry Gatu, assistant editor of Mumenyereri from 1948 to 1952, Nairobi, March 17, 1970.

[31]Odinga, op. cit., p. 82. Odinga has a good account of the financial and technical difficulties the African editors faced.

[32]Gatu interview, op. cit.

[33]Kenya National Archives 8/106 CNC 1/5-60.

[34]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/64, letter dated October 23, 1947, from Central Province Commissioner to Chief Native Commissioner.

[35]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-77, memorandum dated July 30,1948, from Director of Intelligence and Security to Chief Native Commissioner.

[36]KNA 8/103 CNC 1/2/10, correspondence between Chief Native Commissioner and officials of East African Standard and Baraza during this period are in this file.

[37]Ibid., letter dated February 4, 1950.

[38]Ibid., letter dated September 26, 1947.

[39]KNA 8/102 CNC 1/1/41, undated translation of editorial.

[40]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/58-15, undated translation of letter.

[41]KNA 8/105 CNC 1/4-98, memorandum on translation from Radio Posta of September 22, 1948, from Director of Intelligence and Security to Attorney General.

[42]KNA 8/102 CNC 1/1-38 and 50, and 8/106 CNC 1/5/41-55. Also see Corfield, op. cit., p. 196.

[43]KNA 8/108 CNC 1/7/13/2, clipping from Daily Chronicle of December 17, 1947.

[44]KNA 8/108 CNC 1/7/26, memorandum from Director of Security to Attorney General dated June 1, 1948. Clipping from Daily Chronicle of May 29, 1948.

[45]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-58, translation from Mumenyereri of May 10, 1948.

[46]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-78, translation from Mumenyereri of August 2, 1948.

[47]Corfield, op. cit., p. 81.

[48]Montagu Slater, The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta (London: Secker and Warburg, 1959), p. 185.

[49]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-15, undated translation from Mumenyereri.

[50]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-53, letter dated May 3, 1948 to Chief Native Commissioner.

[51]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-48, translation from Mumenyereri of April 5, 1948. Also see Corfield, op. cit., p. 195.

[52]KNA 8/105 CNC 1/4/19-1, translation dated only 1948. This appeared to be an advertisement for a pamphlet written on the land issue by Awori, editor of Radio Posta.

[53]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5-49 and 54, translations from Mumenyereri issues of April 12 and May 3, 1948.

[54]8/102 CNC 1/1/82, translations from Wathiomo Mukinyu of June and August, 1946, and July, 1948.

[55]KNA 8/102 CNC 1/1/81, translation from Hindi ya Gikuyu of July 25, 1948.

[56]KNA 8/102 CNC 1/1/91, letter dated July 27, 1948.

[57]KNA 8/106 CNN 1/5-18, translation from Mumenyereri of December 15, 1947. This is Editor Muoria's version of the encounter.

[58]KNA 8/111 CNC 1/10/3-3/1, translation from Mumenyereri of June 15, 1947.

[59]KNA 8/108 CNC 1/7/2-3. This account is taken from the Daily Chronicle of October 17, 1947. Also see Corfield, op. cit., p. 196.

[60]Ibid. Even Kenyatta said the vernacular newspapers frequently got the facts wrong. See Slater, op. cit., p. 185.

[61]"Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Information Services," op. cit., p.11.

[62]Corfield, op. cit., p. 192.

[63]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/85, memorandum dated September 29, 1947. Of course, European writers have also claimed that colonial policies destroyed African society. For one writer on Kenya who makes claims similar to those found in the letter to Mumenyereri, see Elspeth Huxley and Margery Perham, Race and Politics in Kenya (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 256.

[64]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/55, undated translation.

[65]KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/78, translation dated August 2, 1948.

[66] KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/78, translation dated August 2, 1948

[67] KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/179, translation dated April 12, 1950.

[68] Corfield, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

[69] KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/11, translation dated November 27, 1947.

[70] KNA 8/107 CNC 1/6/9/1, translation dated November 27, 1947.

[71] KNA 8/105 CNC 1/4/10/1, translation dated December 18, 1947.

[72] KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/12, translation dated October 6, 1947.

[73] KNA 8/106 CNC 1/5/60, translation dated March 1, 1948.

[74] Corfield, op. cit., 192-193.

[75] KNA 8/49 CNC 6/2/21, letter dated June 30, 1948.

[76] Legislative Council Debates (Kenya), Vol. 36-38, Col. 197, May 18, 1950.

[77] Daily Chronicle, January 19, 1951, p. 7.

[78] KNA 8/32 CNC A/14. The views are those of Kenya's Press Officer, H.C.E. Downes, in "A Scheme to Improve the African Press of Kenya."

[79] Ibid.

[80] Corfield, op. cit., p. 195.

[81] KNA 8/32 CNC A/14, letter dated October 3, 1952.

[82] Laws of Kenya (1938), S. 38.

[83] Kamiti s/o Kamau v. Rex, 24 Law Reports of Kenya 94 (1950).

[84]East African Standard, August 9 (p. 1) and September 9 (p. 2) and 17 (p. 7), 1952. See also Corfield, op. cit., p. 198.

[85]Corfield, op. cit., p. 198.

[86]KNA 8/104 CNC 1/3. Dunderdale's letter was in the Kenya Weekly News of September 26, 1947.

[87]KNA 8/32 CNC A/14, "A Scheme to Improve the African Press of Kenya."

[88]In a 1973 meeting with several Nairobi journalists the author found that nothing at all was known about the pre-independence Kenya newspapers but it was assumed that they were unimportant and rather irresponsible.

[89]Herbert J. Muller, The Uses of the Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 69-71.

[90]See Hachten, op. cit., pp. 48-49, for evidence that the same is true in East Africa.

[91]Leonard W. Levy, Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History: Legacy of Suppression (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 4.

[92]Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), pp. 17-27. For a specific plea on Kenya see Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938).